



# Weekly wrap up

Friday, August 5, 2005

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## Juvenile Justice Reform

*Steverson: No Better Time Than Now*

During the past several months I've spent a considerable amount of time reading as much as I can find about the current wave of juvenile justice reform sweeping across our country. Don't think for a minute that juvenile justice reform is unique to Tennessee. Communities as divergent as Cook County, Illinois (Chicago), the state of Connecticut, the state of California, Portland, Oregon, Baltimore, Maryland, and the state of Louisiana are just a few of the places across the country that have decided that it is time for major juvenile justice reform efforts.

Those supporting juvenile justice reform come in all sizes and shapes too. In some situations, elected officials are leading the way, demanding that systems be held more accountable for positive outcomes for youth and their families. In some cases advocates for improved legal representation for youth are leading the charge after seeing the number of youth incarcerated swell in spite of lower juvenile crime statistics. In other situations the lead has been taken by those working within agencies responsible for the delivery of services to youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. Like the elected officials they want improved outcomes for youth and their families. Foundations that have typically been involved with child welfare efforts are also joining the juvenile justice reform effort. Foundations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Butler Family Fund are supporting juvenile justice reform efforts at a variety of locations across the country. Whether folks within the system are leading the reform effort or whether legal representation advocates, elected officials, or foundations are driving the reform there seems to be pretty general agreement about the basis issues that need to be addressed in juvenile justice reform efforts. I don't think you will find these issues surprising.

**Reduce the use of detention and institutionalization:** There is recognition that youth posing the most serious threat to public safety need this level of security however most youth can be safely supervised and treated in the community or in non-secure facilities. Tennessee proves this each and every day. The overwhelming majority of delinquent youth committed to DCS are in community based, non-secure programs. We still need to do better. Currently underway is a project to revise our risk assessment instrument. With improved tools I am convinced that we can identify more youth that can be safely placed in settings less restrictive than our youth development centers.

**Develop smaller facilities for meeting the needs of those needing secure environments:** Increasingly, data shows the advantage of treating youth in smaller more home-like secure facilities. It is difficult in large prison-like institutions to provide developmentally appropriate individualized treatment. The location of facilities near the population they serve also allows for increased family participation in treatment and helps to ensure improved outcomes for youth and their families.

While the design of our newest facility, New Visions, offers some challenges its size should be the model for future facilities in Tennessee. If you haven't visited New Visions you might be surprised to see that there are no fences or razor wire.

**Access to good legal counsel:** Good legal counsel certainly plays a role in determining who enters the system and how "deeply" they enter the system. Have you ever seen an attorney walking down the hall in the county court house "recruited" to represent a child and given 15 minutes or less to prepare to "represent" that child? I have. We are working to partner with the Administrative Office of the Supreme Court to improve representation for youth all across the state.

**Reduction in racial disparity:** In every county in this state, regardless of the minority population, African-Americans are over-represented in our DCS custody population. We can't solve this problem alone. It will take a concerted effort by DCS, the juvenile courts, public defenders, law enforcement, and community leaders to solve this issue.

**Improvement of services for youth with special needs:** Communities across the country are in need of alternative services for youth with special needs. The juvenile justice system has too often become the dumping ground for youth with special needs. A youth's delinquency should be the reason for a youth entering the system not his/her disability. Tennessee finds itself in the same situation as many other states; youth are in need of more accessible, quality, community-based treatment for serious emotional disturbance and substance abuse.

**Create or Expand Effective Community Based Programs:** Communities across the country are finding that there are effective community based programs for the most difficult to serve youth. Intensive probation and aftercare programs focusing on treatment not just surveillance need to be available alternatives in every county. Maybe there are some DCS Regional Administrators that would like to step up and get creative with caseload assignments and create pilot programs in a few counties. Home confinement with electronic monitoring, day and evening reporting centers incorporating the elements of Multi-Systemic Therapy or Functional Family Therapy are other alternatives to custody that have proven themselves.

Aren't these exciting and challenging times in the world of juvenile justice? The DCS Juvenile Justice Team Excellence is busy addressing many of the issues outlined above. Let one of the Team Excellence members hear from you. Let them hear your ideas about how to improve the work we do. Get involved!

Ken Steverson

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## Phillips Tapped for Honor



Hamilton County Team Coordinator Mark Phillips received the Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Services in the Field of Juvenile Justice at the Tennessee Juvenile Court Services Association Conference on August 1. I'm sure you'll agree that he was very deserving of this honor. Please join me in congratulating him!

Elleni Bean

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## Sick Leave Bank

*Open for Enrollment*

Don't let an unplanned accident or illness cause you even more pain by being financially unprepared. Protect yourself and your family by enrolling in the Sick Leave Bank. By donating 4 sick days at enrollment and 1 sick day annually, you may be eligible to draw up to maximum of 90 workdays for any one personal illness, recurring diagnosed illness, or accident.

**The annual open enrollment to join the Sick Leave Bank began August 1 and closes October 31.**

Enrollment Requirements:

- Employee must be entitled to accrue sick leave pursuant to T.C.A. 8-50-802.

- Employee must be employed 12 full consecutive months immediately preceding application for participation.
- Employee must be in a leave accruing status.
- Employee must have a sick leave balance of at least six (6) days.
- A contribution of four sick leave days at initial enrollment and/or possibly one day per year. This yearly contribution may be waived in any year by notice from the Board of Trustees.

Ready to sign up? Complete the enrollment form that was included with your paycheck stub on July 29. Forms must be routed through your personnel office no later than October 31.

Please contact your appropriate personnel office if you need an enrollment form, have questions or need additional information.

**Abby Stroud**

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## **Softball Powerhouse**

*Parlays first-round bye into second-place tournament finish --  
and some big bucks too*

I wanted to take a moment and mention that some East Tennessee DCS employees formed a softball team and competed in the 5th Annual REACHS Softball Tournament fund-raiser for the Children of the Cumberland's Child Advocacy Center in LaFollette. This tournament was held July 29-30. Our team received a first round bye on Friday night.

We played four games on Saturday advancing to the finals where we took second Place.

Our Team was comprised of the following DCS employees:

Rick Miller; Melanie Collins; Gary Hicks; David Whaley; Kim Fuqua  
Wayne Dawson; Steve Collins

Other Members included:

Tiffany Pryor; Ashley Fuqua; Shelley Langley; Tee Williams; Mark Lay; Tim Sharp

We were able to assist the Campbell County Child Advocacy Center in their efforts to raise approximately \$3,000.00 from this event. I want to thank everyone whom participated. It was a long day, though also an enjoyable one.

**Steven L. Collins**

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# Northwest Pulls Out All Stops

*Small Event Blossoms Into Jumbo Community Festival*

Obion, Lake, Crockett and Dyer counties in the Northwest Region have planned a Community Awareness Fall Festival in hopes of unifying DCS and the community as well as raising awareness of the need for foster, resource, adoptive parents and mentors for our youth. This recruitment project is the first of its kind, and there has been great response from the community in its willingness to help DCS make this project a success.

The primary purpose is to let the community know exactly what DCS does, what resources are available to the kids in these counties, and to let the community know about our need for resource homes. What started out as a small endeavor has blossomed into a big event with lots of community participation and support!

The event will have live entertainment, food and activities for all ages. Booths from mental health providers, non-profit agencies and local organizations will be set up around the grounds. A silent auction will be on site for bidding along with a yard sale with the proceeds going to Christmas for our children in state custody. Law enforcement, firemen, National Guard, Exchange Club is going to participate and help us with the event. The local businesses that are sponsoring this festival are numbered in the hundreds. We are hoping for local officials, schools, state representatives and other organizations to be present.

The event will be held at the Dyer County Fairgrounds on Saturday Sept 17, 2005 from 10 a.m. - 4pm.

**Cynthia Langford**